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BOOK REVIEWS

THE CHANGING DRAMA: CONTRIBUTIONS AND TENDENCIES. By Archibald Henderson. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1914. (pp. xvi+311).

In his new volume, *The Changing Drama*, Professor Henderson makes an effort to state anew the principles that appear to be guiding the contemporary drama. It is an easy task, and one already many times performed, to point out how and why the formulas of Aristotelian criticism fail to satisfy us in the modern drama, even when modified and newly framed by Freytag. But it is not so easy to discover, or rather to make a sound statement of rules that do still hold good. In the attempt Mr. Henderson does not, of course, discard the Poetics entirely; nor does he venture upon dogmatic statements, for the spirit of his criticism seems fairly indicated by the quotation from Ibsen heading the second chapter: "Do you really attach much value to categories? I, for my part, believe that the dramatic categories are elastic, and that they must accommodate themselves to the literary fact—not *vice versa*." Accordingly, the book is more successful in clearing the ground of the débris of old ideas than in establishing a clearly defined new structure. This remark is not made with intent to disparage; for the reviewer finds Mr. Henderson's criticism in general very sound, based upon and illuminated by very wide reading in the drama and in criticism of the drama; but it is nevertheless true that one leaves the book rather with a feeling of vague approval than with the conviction that can turn to chapter and verse for quotation in support of a definite view.

With this general caveat, for I am not quite sure that I shall be doing the book justice, it may be said that the author makes more or less distinct for us certain ideas that should control in criticism of the play of to-day. The idea of the first chapter, "Drama in the New Age," and in a sense of the whole book, is that the modern drama of Ibsen, Hauptmann, Strindberg, Shaw, and Brieux deals with man in society, and so deals as to show not merely the fault or the crime of the individual man, but the cause of this in society. This is eminently true; it at once

separates the modern from the Shakespearean play; and a corollary from it, developed in a later chapter, at once disposes of the "hero," the protagonist, of the earlier type. Again, another distinction between the new and the old practically arises out of this, namely, that the modern play is not concerned either with visiting punishment upon or providing regeneration for its characters; the crime, for example, is not the crime of the individual alone, but of the society that made him; the problems are not of his setting, not for him nor the dramatist to solve; again citing Ibsen (p. 14), "A man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs"; and (p. 111) "the greatest error which modern criticism has made proceeds from the vicious assumption that the social dramatist presumes to answer the questions which he raises. . . . The general problem, concretized by the dramatist in a highly specialized case, is brought sharply to the attention and to the conscience of the audience. The dramatist brings to his audience a sense of conviction: we feel that we are somehow involved in the affair. The guilt of the *particeps criminis* weighs upon us. It is not for the dramatist, but for us, to find the solution of the social problem." This again is well stated; and did space permit we might show how well Mr. Henderson presents the discussion of the new technique of the drama, a technique that dispenses with the more obvious conventionalities, such as the soliloquy and the aside, and provides in minutest detail of amplified stage direction for the exact interpretation of the play by the actor and for its vivid realization by the reader; for the present drama has already become in Europe and is becoming here a reading drama, a truly literary or academic play capable of holding the interest of the thoughtful reader as well as of thrilling him during the brief hours of physical representation. This, it seems to me, should be made one of the cardinal differences between the new play and the acting play that has held the stage for more than two centuries. In a measure, the divine poetry of Shakespeare has preserved his plays to us as reading plays, a distinction practically accorded to none of his contemporaries or successors; but can the reader know, for example, whether Hamlet wore a picture of his father in a locket

or pointed to a portrait on the wall (III, 4:55)? Shaw or Ibsen would never leave us in doubt.

It is a pity that, where one finds so much that is worthy, one should find an occasional lapse, due either to mere quibbles or to failure to perceive that they are mere quibbles. For example (p. 16), Mr. Henderson rather belabors Molière—in a restrained way, to be sure—for the the dictum that the rule of rules for art is that it should please. Being at a safe distance, we say, of course it is. Mr. Henderson is merely quibbling on the word “please”; we submit that Molière knew perfectly well what he was saying and doing; *please* may and does mean merely amuse, make laugh, or what not; it also means to give pleasure, and this has a very broad sense, quite broad enough to cover the sensation to be got from any worthy social drama or moral drama—and if the reader does not get this “pleasure,” then, like Dante’s lovers, he will say, “And on that book we read no more that day,” nor any other day. In another place, while attempting to elaborate a distinction of doubtful utility between a play and a drama, Mr. Henderson says (p. 182): “All dramas are plays; all plays are not dramas. The drama may be defined as the play in which there is a distinctive plot,” etc. It is implied that there is no distinctive plot in the modern play. One would ask, how distinctive should the plot be to raise the play from its lowly state? In fact, the effort to eliminate the idea of a plot involves another mere quibble: there is plot in Mr. Henderson’s “play,” though it may not be plot of the old kind, not a chain of incidents, but a mere succession of scenes from which an idea, more or less clear, emerges before the mind of the spectator, the very idea that he himself (p. 65) has (I think, with doubtful right) claimed as the “particular contribution of modern dramaturgy,” namely the “unity of impression, or *Stimmung*.”

On the whole, *The Changing Drama* is stimulating and pleasant reading, a book that one should wish to see widely read; for it handles with intelligence and skill the great drama of the day which is quietly taking for its own provinces that have for a century been left to the novel, and reaching out after the greater public that is not always accessible in the theatre. PIERCE BUTLER.